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The Feast of the Epiphany of Our Lord
6 January 2013
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Isaiah 60:1-6

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

In high school and college Nikki and I served as camp counselors.

Every morning we woke the kids up by singing,

“Arise, and shine, and give God the glory, glory.

Rise, and shine, and give God the glory, glory.

Rise and shine and give God the glory, glory,

children of the Lord.”

We always sang with that obnoxiously happy tone in our voices.

We acted as if there was nothing better than waking up to the glory of God.

And while that’s absolutely true—

it was an act.

We weren’t necessarily *lying*—

but it’s not like we wake up every morning now singing that.

That was camp.

It was for these kids.

It was fun.

But that’s not how everyone wakes up.

Some people wake up with no song, with no smile, with no joy.

Some people wake up to nothing but darkness and the desire to go back to sleep.

Some people wake up alone, depressed, and physically ill.

And then some people just don’t wake up.

So what does our reading from Isaiah mean for them?

What is this sort of person to do?

What if I can’t arise?

What if I don’t want to, or hate getting up?

What if I don’t shine, and the glory of God *isn’t* around me?

Where’s Epiphany then?

Where is this light that shines through the darkness?

Where is God when I need Him most?

And when will this pain stop?

Isaiah says,

“Lift up your eyes all around, and see” (Isa 60:4a).

But for many, the response is:

See what?

What if you only seek darkness—
 every day, every moment—
 what if there's no light in your life?

Is it a lie?
 Is Isaiah simply giving us nice and pious thoughts?
 How am I to lift myself from my slumber and deep sadness?
 How can I escape the overwhelming guilt and shame and fear?

And I can tell you one thing,
 that obnoxious camp song won't help!

Telling someone to just "get up and arise and shine and be happy"
 won't cut it.
 That just makes things worse.

You think they don't know that they should be happy?
 You think we don't know that God is good and that all things are supposed to work out well?
 We all know that—
 the problem is that we rarely see it that way now.

And eventually, we start to wonder whether it's true.

Some feel this sort of sadness, or depression, or seeming death much more acutely than others.
 But everyone with sin, death, and the devil hanging around them experiences this to some degree.

This is because our world is a dark world.
 Light, especially this time of year, is rare.

And I don't just mean the light of the sun—though that too—
 I mean the light of joy, and of goodness, and of purity, and of love.

That sort of light does not come naturally to us.
 And there are times where we feel it's abandoned us completely—
 even betrayed us.

But then comes Isaiah's words:

**"For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
 and thick darkness the peoples;
 but the Lord will arise upon you,
 and His glory will be seen upon you."** (Isa 60:2)

We first hear of this Light at Christmas—again, from Isaiah:

**"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
 those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
 on them has light shined."** (Isa 9:2)

Notice that it's not just a light that exists in general,
 it's not an abstract concept of light, but a real, tangible light—
 and it's a light that comes *to you*.

This light first manifested itself—*Epiphanied* itself—in a star.

**“Wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying,
 ‘Where is He who has been born king of the Jews?
 For we saw His star when it rose
 and have come to worship Him.’”** (Mt 2:1-2)

Then, **“the star came to rest over the place where the child was.
 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.
 And going into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother,
 and they fell down and worshiped Him.”** (Mt 2:10-11)

It was a real light that shined in the midst of real darkness.

But the light of the star was not the light Isaiah spoke of—
 that was merely the instrument, the sign that pointed towards the *true Light*—
 Jesus the Christ.

As He says in John's Gospel:
“I AM the Light of the World” (Jn 8:12).

And He goes on,
“Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

This Jesus is the Light that shines in the darkness.
 He is the one who breaks the darkness.

But most importantly,
 He is the one who comes down and *enters our darkness*.

He enters your mornings that you fear to face.
 He enters your depression and stands there with you.
 He suffers your guilt, bears your shame, and dies your death.

Whether you think it's fair or not,
 that's who this Jesus is—
 God for you!

He loves you to the point of entering your dark world and bringing you out.

Dear Christian, cling to this promise—
 that Christ is the light of your world.

Even though you may not feel it,
 even though you might not understand it or sometimes doubt it,
 cling to the promise.

For the reality is often very different than what it seems to be.
 Though our lives sometimes seem lost and confused,
 they we feel guilt and shame and sorrow and death—
 they are not true.

Your darkness has been cast away.
 Your guilt has been born and the blood required for your sin has been shed.
 This Christ Child, the Light of the World, Jesus Himself was crucified, died, and buried, *for you!*

And because of that alone,
 “**you also shall see and be radiant,**” Isaiah says (Isa 60:5).

You will shine.
 You will arise—
 not just in the morning from your present darkness,
 but from the grave, from death, from sin itself.

You will arise and shine and bear this light of Christ.

This is the reality.
 Do not believe the lies of Satan.
 Don't trust what is felt, or what your eyes might see in this dark world around you—
 listen to what He says.
 Listen to who He is for you.
 Listen to His promise of life, even life from the dead.

And then, listening and believing,
 come with the wise men and all the saints before you.
 Come and worship this newborn king!

Come with your gifts!
 Come with your gold to pay for the work done here and throughout the world.
 Come with your frankincense,
 that priestly offering of prayers for those still walking in the darkness and fear of death.
 Come with your myrrh, that ointment that joins Christ's suffering to our own.

Anoint your heads with the joy of paradise.
 Arise and shine—for your light has come.

And best of all,
 He's come to you!

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit